Pervasive effects of Wolbachia on host activity

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1 ABSTRACT

2 Heritable symbionts have diverse effects on the physiology, reproduction, and fitness of 3 their hosts. Maternally transmitted Wolbachia are one of the most common endosymbionts in nature, infecting about half of all insect species. We test the hypothesis that Wolbachia alter host 4 behavior by assessing the effects of 14 different Wolbachia strains on the locomotor activity of 5 6 nine Drosophila host species. We find that Wolbachia alter the activity of six different host 7 genotypes, including all hosts in our assay infected with wRi-like Wolbachia strains (wRi, wSuz, wAur), which have rapidly spread among Drosophila species in only the last 13,000 years. While 8 9 Wolbachia effects on host activity were common, the direction of these effects varied unpredictability and sometimes depended on host sex. We hypothesize that the prominent effects 10 of wRi-like Wolbachia may be explained by patterns of Wolbachia titer and localization within 11 host somatic tissues, particularly in the central nervous system. Our findings support the view 12 13 that Wolbachia have wide-ranging effects on host behavior. The fitness consequences of these behavioral modifications are important for understanding the evolution of host-symbiont 14 15 interactions, including how Wolbachia spread within host populations.

16 INTRODUCTION

17	Insects harbor microorganisms that have wide-ranging effects on their performance and
18	fitness [1-3], including manipulations to reproduction [4-7], provisioning of nutrients [1,8,9],
19	modifications of thermotolerance [10,11], and defense against pathogens [12–15]. Microbes may
20	also alter host behavior [16-21]. In extreme instances, parasitic microbes can induce behaviors
21	that increase the likelihood of transmission—for example, by directing hosts to habitats that
22	promote transmission [22-28]. Infected hosts may also change their own behavior as an immune
23	strategy against infection, including seeking warm temperatures to induce a "behavioral fever"
24	[29,30] or reducing activity and increasing sleep time [19,31–34]. Such behavioral modifications
25	have important implications for microbe spread and host fitness.
26	Maternally transmitted Wolbachia are the most common endosymbionts in nature,
27	infecting many arthropods [5,35,36] and two distantly related groups of nematodes [37].
28	Discordant Wolbachia and host phylogenies indicate that many hosts have recently acquired
29	Wolbachia via introgressive and horizontal transfer [38-43]. Wolbachia are primarily transmitted
30	vertically by female hosts, so natural selection favors beneficial effects on host fitness that
31	promote spread [44-47]. Maternal transmission occurs via the host reproductive system, but
32	Wolbachia are also found in host somatic tissues, including nervous, digestive, and metabolic
33	tissues [48-51]. Still, the behavioral and physiological consequences of somatic infections are
34	poorly understood [19,51].
35	Prior work indicates Wolbachia influence several host behaviors [19,52,53], including
36	sleep [54–56] and temperature preference [20,57,58]. We broadly test for Wolbachia effects on
37	the locomotor activity of <i>Drosophila</i> hosts infected with A-group <i>Wolbachia</i> ($N = 11$), B-group
38	Wolbachia ($N = 1$), and an A- and B-group co-infection ($N = 1$). Our analysis includes two
39	prominent A-group clades that recently spread among Drosophila: wMel-like Wolbachia
40	(wMelCS, two wMel variants, wYak, wSan, and wTei) and wRi-like Wolbachia (wRi, wSuz, and
41	wAur) [42,43]. We find that Wolbachia effects on host activity are common, particularly for
42	wRi-like Wolbachia, a "super-spreader" strain that rapidly spread among Drosophila species in
43	the last ~13,000 years [42].
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47 METHODS

48 *Fly lines*

49 We evaluated 13 different Wolbachia-infected host genotypes (Figure 1, Table S1), 50 consisting of nine Drosophila species infected with 14 different A- and B-group Wolbachia that diverged up to 46 million years ago [59]. For two of the host species, D. melanogaster and D. 51 52 simulans, we tested multiple Wolbachia-infected genotypes. This included a D. simulans host co-53 infected with A-group wHa and B-group wNo [60–63]. We used tetracycline treatment as previously described [20] to generate uninfected genotypes to pair with each infected genotype, 54 while taking care to avoid detrimental effects of the antibiotic treatment on mitochondrial 55 56 function [64] (see Supplemental Methods). 57 58 *Host locomotor activity assays* 59 We reared flies at 25°C under a 12-h light:12-h dark cycle (Percival model I-36LL) on a standard food diet [20]. Each day, we collected a batch of female and male virgins for one pair of 60 61 uninfected and infected genotypes. The four treatment groups (uninfected females, infected 62 females, uninfected males, and infected males) were maintained in isolation until they were 3 to 5 days old. We then measured the locomotor activity of the batch of flies using a 16-chamber 63 64 flow-through respirometry and data acquisition system (MAVEn, Sable Systems International). 65 The MAVEn has 16 2.4 ml volume polycarbonate animal chambers and an activity board that 66 uses infrared light (invisible to flies) to monitor animal activity in each chamber, sampled at 1 Hz (Figure S1). Individual flies were aspirated into a randomly assigned chamber and allowed to 67

adjust to the new environment for 0.5 hours. Activity measurements were then recorded over a 3hour period between the hours of 0900 and 1600.

70 The raw outputs from the activity sensors were transformed into the activity index 71 absolute distance sums (ADS). We calculated ADS by first calculating the cumulative sum of the 72 absolute difference between consecutive activity readings, and then calculating the slope of 73 cumulative activity vs. time [65,66]. We used mean ADS over the 3-hour period as our estimate 74 of locomotor activity for each fly; however, our analyses were robust regardless of how we 75 quantified activity (see Supplemental Methods). We found that the mean ADS activity data required a transformation for statistical analysis; however, a single data transformation was not 76 77 suitable for all host species. We used a log transformation of mean ADS for *D. simulans*, *D.*

suzukii, *D. auraria*, *D. mauritiana*, and *D. sechellia*, and a square root transformation for *D. melanogaster*, *D. yakuba*, *D. santomea*, and *D. teissieri*. We present a full statistical analysis of
all datasets in Tables S2 and S3, respectively.

81 We used the log- and square root-transformed mean ADS data as dependent variables in 82 linear models. We included infection status, sex, and an infection-by-sex interaction effect as 83 independent variables, as well as additional independent variables to account for other potential 84 sources of activity variation: randomly assigned animal chamber (1-16), experimental start time, 85 mean water vapor (ppt), mean relative humidity (%), mean temperature (°C), and mean light 86 intensity (lux) [65,66]. We evaluated the significance of individual effects using *F* tests and type 87 III sum of squares using the "Anova" function in the *car* R package [67,68].

88

89 Wolbachia phylogenomic analysis

We used publicly available *Wolbachia* genome assemblies [20,42,43,59,69–71], and new 90 Illumina sequencing, to generate a Bayesian phylogram [20] (see Supplemental Methods). 91 92 Wolbachia effects on host activity were especially common for wRi-like Wolbachia, so we used 93 the phylogram to test whether Wolbachia effects on hosts exhibit phylogenetic signal. First, we 94 treated Wolbachia effects on host locomotor activity as a binary trait and tested for phylogenetic 95 signal using the D statistic [72], implemented in the *caper* R package [73]. Second, we treated 96 Wolbachia effects on activity as a continuous trait and tested for phylogenetic signal using 97 Pagel's lambda (λ) [74]. Here, we analyzed each sex separately, because we found significant infection-by-sex interaction effects on activity (Tables S2 and S3). For each sex, we extracted the 98 99 least-square (LS) mean ADS for infected and uninfected flies from the linear models (Tables S2 100 and S3), and used the change in LS mean activity as a continuous character to calculate the 101 maximum likelihood value of Pagel's λ [74,75]. We used a likelihood ratio test to compare our 102 fitted value of λ to a model assuming no phylogenetic signal ($\lambda = 0$) using the "phylosig" 103 function in the R package phytools [76].

104

105 **RESULTS**

106 Wolbachia infections modify host locomotor activity

We assayed the locomotor activity of 3,104 flies (Figure 1). *Wolbachia* had a significant
effect on the activity of six host genotypes, including hosts infected with both A- and B-group

109 Wolbachia. Interestingly, the direction of Wolbachia effects on host activity varied by genotype 110 and sex (Figure 2). We found a significant Wolbachia infection-by-sex interaction effect for the 111 wMelCS-D. melanogaster genotype that increased male activity (F = 4.566, P = 0.033; Table S3). We also found a significant infection-by-sex effect for the wRi-D. simulans genotype, but 112 113 *Wolbachia* increased female activity (F = 8.150, P = 0.005; Table S2). The two other closely related wRi-like Wolbachia, wSuz and wAur, also had significant effects on host activity. The 114 115 wSuz-D. suzukii genotype had a significant main effect of Wolbachia that reduced host activity (F = 11.311, P < 0.001; Table S2), and the wAur-D. auraria genotype had a significant 116 infection-by-sex interaction that reduced female activity (F = 6.584, P = 0.011; Table S2). The 117 wHa-D. simulans genotype had a significant main effect of Wolbachia that increased host 118 119 activity (F = 7.764, P = 0.006; Table S2). Lastly, we found the wHa-wNo co-infected D. simulans genotype had a significant infection-by-sex interaction effect that reduced male activity 120 121 (F = 7.076, P = 0.008; Table S2). Because this genotype is co-infected, we do not know the relative contributions of wHa and wNo to variation in host activity. See the Supplemental Results 122 123 for a discussion of how other variables contributed to variation in locomotor activity.

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125 *Limited evidence for phylogenetic signal*

We estimated a Bayesian phylogram of A- and B-group Wolbachia using 211 single-copy 126 127 genes of identical length in all Wolbachia genomes, spanning 178,569 bp (Figure 2). We then 128 tested whether closely related Wolbachia have similar effects on host activity. When treating 129 *Wolbachia* effects on activity as a binary trait, our estimate of D = 0.322 was low, but not statistically different from a model of D = 1 assuming phylogenetic randomness (P = 0.101) or a 130 131 model of D = 0 with strong phylogenetic signal (P = 0.198). Simulations of similar phylogenies 132 with an increasing number of *Wolbachia* strains suggest that at least N = 50 strains are required to differentiate our estimated value of D = 0.322 from a model of phylogenetic randomness (D =133 134 1) (Figures S4 and S5). Thus, *Wolbachia* effects on host activity may exhibit phylogenetic signal, but many more *Wolbachia* strains are required to test this hypothesis. Unfortunately, N =135 136 50 strains are not presently available in culture. We also treated Wolbachia changes to host activity as a continuous trait; however, we found that maximum likelihood fitted λ values were 137 138 extremely low, indicative of no phylogenetic signal. λ values generated from the LS mean log-139 transformed ADS data were not statistically different from zero for females ($\lambda < 0.001, P = 1$) or

140 males ($\lambda < 0.001$, P = 1). This was also true when we repeated the analyses for the LS mean 141 square root-transformed ADS data for females ($\lambda < 0.001$, P = 1) and males ($\lambda < 0.001$, P = 1). 142

143 **DISCUSSION**

Our analyses suggest that *Wolbachia* commonly alter host locomotor activity, which may affect host fitness. Locomotion is a basic host activity underlying many ecologically important behaviors, including foraging, thermoregulation, and mate seeking. In combination with our recent work demonstrating pervasive effects of A- and B-group *Wolbachia* on host temperature preference [20], we posit that *Wolbachia* infections may often alter host behavior.

149 The wRi-like Wolbachia strains in our study (wRi, wSuz, and wAur) consistently altered 150 host activity. We found a low, but non-significant D value of 0.322, suggesting effects on host 151 activity may exhibit phylogenetic signal; although, an excessive number of Wolbachia strains are 152 required to test this hypothesis. Our findings are consistent with prior experiments demonstrating 153 that wRi increased female D. simulans activity in response to olfactory cues [77,78]. We 154 hypothesize that the prominence of wRi-like Wolbachia effects on host activity relative to other 155 strains may be due to variation in Wolbachia tissue localization [49,52]. wRi occurs at high titer in adult *D. simulans* brains and localizes to specific regions, whereas *w*Mel shows a relatively 156 157 even distribution in D. melanogaster [52]. wRi also occurs at higher titer in the ventral nerve cord, which is a major neural circuit center for motor activities such as walking [52,79–81]. 158 159 Future experiments should compare Wolbachia titer and localization in adult brains for wRi-like 160 variants and strains that do not alter locomotor activity.

161 We also found considerable variation in the direction and sex-bias of *Wolbachia* effects 162 on locomotor activity (Figure 2). Wolbachia decreased activity for wSuz, wAur, and the wNo-163 wHa co-infection, whereas wMelCS, wRi, and wHa increased activity. These effects were 164 female-biased for wRi and wAur, but male-biased for wMelCS and wNo-wHa. This variation had 165 no relationship to the Wolbachia phylogeny, because we found no evidence for phylogenetic 166 signal when measuring *Wolbachia* effects on females and males as a continuous trait ($\lambda < 0.001$). Specific Wolbachia effects on host activity may depend on interactions with the host 167 168 background. For example, our work and others' suggests that identical wMelCS variants have 169 different effects on D. melanogaster temperature preference depending on the host background 170 [20,57,58]. Host genomes also modify Wolbachia titer [82], Wolbachia maternal transmission

[83], components of host fitness [84–87], and the strength of cytoplasmic incompatibility [88–
90].

173 Changes to host activity could underlie Wolbachia-induced behaviors that promote 174 infection spread. For example, wMel-infected D. melanogaster have higher field recapture rates 175 than uninfected flies [91], and long distance dispersal of the spider *Erigone atra* is altered by 176 *Rickettsia*, an endosymbiont closely related to *Wolbachia* [92]. Our own work suggests 177 Wolbachia may alter host temperature preference to promote Wolbachia replication within host bodies [20]. Other experiments suggest that wMel and wRi may influence male mating rate 178 179 [93,94]. Alternatively, hosts may be modifying their own behavior as a response to *Wolbachia* 180 infection. Several studies indicate that wMel alters circadian activity and sleep patterns of D. 181 melanogaster [52,54–56]. For example, Bi et al. [55] report that wMel increases sleep time, which could represent a host immune response to infection [19]. Ultimately, these effects on host 182 183 behavior factor into how Wolbachia influence host fitness, which determines the spread and 184 persistence of *Wolbachia* in host populations [4,95–98]. Because locomotor activity is such a fundamental host behavior, our results suggest Wolbachia may have complex and variable 185 186 effects on many components of host fitness.

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193 DATA AVAILABILITY

All data and code are available on Dryad (doi:10.5061/dryad.6t1g1jwxv; temporary URL:

195 https://datadryad.org/stash/share/D4Yi8zYFchXE-LIFgTc6S91s2N15Afcwu4-FkxJZPaA).

196 Genome assemblies will be deposited on GenBank upon acceptance.

197 FIGURE LEGENDS

- **198** Figure 1. Activity of uninfected and infected flies for each sex of each genotype. Activity is
- 199 measured as mean absolute distance sums (ADS). Significance was evaluated using linear
- 200 models (Tables S2 and S3).
- 201
- **Figure 2.** (A) Estimated Bayesian phylogram for A- and B-group *Wolbachia* strains. The
- 203 divergence estimate for A- and B-groups is superimposed from Meany et al. [59]. All nodes have
- 204 Bayesian posterior probabilities of 1. (B) *Wolbachia* effects on host activity scored as a binary
- trait: *Wolbachia* significantly altered host activity (black circle) or had no effect (white circle).
- 206 (C) Wolbachia effects on activity scored as a continuous trait: the change in least-square (LS)
- 207 mean log-transformed activity (ADS) for each sex. LS means were generated from linear models
- 208 (Table S2). LS mean square root-transformed ADS data are shown in Figure S3.

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